

UN Climate Change (UNFCCC Secretariat) contribution for the preparation of the Secretary General's background note for the preparator meeting of the 2020 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14

(i) *Activities, challenges and opportunities relating to the implementation of SDG 14*

Background, status and trends

The ocean/climate nexus is an integral part of the climate system. It is also an increasingly integral part of action on climate change under the UNFCCC. The UNFCCC process provides various opportunities to advance action on climate change and SDG 14.

Protection of the ocean is an important theme throughout the UNFCCC, the SBSTA, the Cancun Agreements and the Paris Agreement and is reflected across various mandated work programmes under these agreements. The IPCC's recently published Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC), approved in September 2019, assesses the latest scientific knowledge about the physical science basis and impacts of climate change on ocean, coastal, polar and mountain ecosystems, and the human communities that depend on them.

The **UNFCCC** recognizes the importance of the ocean and adaptation, and the challenges required for actions.¹ The "climate system" is defined under the Convention as "the totality of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere and geosphere and their interactions."²

The **Cancun Agreements**³ established the Cancun Adaptation Framework. This included establishment of the national adaptation plan (NAP) process to enable Parties to formulate and implement NAPs as a means of identifying medium- and long-term adaptation needs and developing and implementing strategies and programmes to address those needs. All NAPs submitted to the secretariat to date include projects on ocean and coastal zones.

The Cancun decision also identified the "need to strengthen international cooperation and expertise in order to understand and reduce loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events (including sea level rise, increasing temperatures, ocean acidification, glacial retreat and related impacts, salinization, land and forest degradation, loss of biodiversity and desertification)"

The **Paris Agreement**⁴ notes in the preambular: "the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity...". The ocean plays a direct and/or indirect role in the goals under the Paris Agreement, including on adaptation, mitigation and assessing long-term progress.

Under the Paris Agreement, over 70% of current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) mention ocean-related topics with the dominant issues being: coastal impacts, ocean warming impacts, fisheries impact, ocean research and marine ecosystem impacts⁵. These NDCs will be renewed or updated in 2020.

The importance of the ocean in the climate system and the need for action at the ocean/climate nexus to support the Paris Agreement is increasingly recognised under the UNFCCC.

¹ UNFCCC Article 4.1.: "all Parties shall promote sustainable management, and promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases, including biomass, forests and **oceans** as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems."

UNFCCC² Article 1.3

³ Decision 1/CP.16

⁴ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

⁵ <https://escholarship.org/content/qt5255342w/qt5255342w.pdf>.

The **Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice** (SBSTA) under the UNFCCC has identified the importance of systematic observation and research to fully understand the role of the ocean in climate change, predict changes, determine risk and appropriate action. It recognises the development of the GCOS global climate indicators⁶ and the importance of the ocean indicators.⁷

At SBSTA 48 (May 2018), the SBSTA concluded that future **Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation to climate change** (NWP) thematic areas should focus on emerging issues in relation to climate change including: oceans, coastal areas and ecosystems, including mega deltas, coral reefs and mangroves⁸. The SBSTA 50 (June 2019) mandated several actions under the thematic area of oceans. Oceans is the focus of a thematic areas under the Nairobi Work Programme in 2019, including the focal point forum at SBSTA 51 (December 2019). The progress made will be reported to Parties for their consideration at SBSTA 52 (May/June 2020). A range of activities under the NWP is in progress to advance action through knowledge in this thematic area.

The work programme of the **Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage** (WIM) addresses ocean issues, which include both slow and rapid onset events, non-economic losses and irreversible impacts (e.g. coral bleaching). The Executive Committee of the WIM are working with the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) to prepare a policy brief on technology to avert, minimize and address loss and damage in coastal zones⁹.

Under the **Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action** (GCA), ocean and coastal zone are a key theme of the UNFCCC global climate action agenda, which has provided a platform for stakeholders to collaborate on ocean and climate change action.

The **IPCC's** recently published **Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC)** (approved at its 51st Session held on 20–23 September 2019, Principality of Monaco) assesses the latest scientific knowledge about the physical science basis and impacts of climate change on ocean, coastal, polar and mountain ecosystems, and the human communities that depend on them.

The Summary for Policymakers was approved at the Second Joint Session of Working Groups I and II of the IPCC and accepted at its 51st Session on the 24th September 2019.¹⁰

The SROCC includes focus on the vulnerabilities of ocean ecosystems as well as evaluating adaptation capacities. Options for achieving climate-resilient development pathways are presented.

The SROCC as well as the *Special Report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems* (SROCC) will each be dedicated a Special Event during SBSTA 51¹¹ in Madrid, Spain, in order to facilitate the understanding of their content and implications

Challenges and opportunities

Climate change directly impacts achievement of various SDG 14 targets including:

- Ocean warming and other impacts of climate change is causing **degradation of coastal and marine ecosystems** - the IPCC identify that 70–90% of **coral reefs are dead** at 1.5°C and are gone as we know them (99% decrease) at 2°C (indicator 14.2);

⁶ <https://gcos.wmo.int/en/global-climate-indicators>

⁷ FCCC/SBSTA/2017/7 paragraphs 53-54

⁸ FCCC/SBSTA/2017/7 paragraph 21.

⁹ FCCC/SB/2017/1/Add.1, FCCC/SB/2018/1.

¹⁰ <https://www.ipcc.ch/event/second-joint-session-of-ipcc-working-groups-i-and-ii-and-ipcc-51/>.

¹¹ <https://unfccc.int/event/sbsta-51>.

- Urgent carbon dioxide emission reduction by Parties under the Paris Agreement would ameliorate further ocean acidification (indicator 14.3);
- Marine protected areas and sustainable fishing must take into account climate change and be climate smart (indicator 14.5, 14.7)

Furthermore, the **importance of scientific knowledge** on the ocean as highlighted under SDG 14 (indicator 14.A) is reflected in the recognition of the importance of the same knowledge by the SBSTA.

Climate action focusing on ocean ecosystems presents an opportunity for action for mitigation and adaptation to build resilience and generate co-benefits, including:

- for governments, communities and stakeholders living with the ocean every day and living with the increasing risks in the next decades as identified in the SROCC;
- **NDCs** (including adaptation and mitigation) and **NAPs** should **ensure appropriate focus on oceans**, including increasing ambition on oceans in the 2020 revised/updated NDCs;
- Action at the climate/ocean nexus can include:
 1. **Adaptation actions**, such as relevant nature-based solutions, climate-proofed marine protected areas, ecosystem approaches to fisheries management, and resilient development for coastal communities;
 2. **Mitigation actions**, such as renewable blue energy, reduction in emissions from maritime transport, and reporting using the IPCC 2013 **Wetlands Supplement** to the 2006 IPCC reporting guidelines for GHG inventories
 3. **Synergistic actions**, such as protection and restoration of blue-carbon ecosystems including mangrove, seagrass, salt marsh, as well as wetlands.
 4. **Actions to address loss and damage**, such as early warning systems

(ii) Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation

Climate action focusing on ocean ecosystems is an increasing area of activity under the UNFCCC process, in light of unprecedented climate change impacts on the ocean and coastal areas and with growing need of the countries to prepare for an uncertain future. The IPCC SROCC stresses the importance of how the ocean and coastal ecosystems can play a key role in helping communities adapt to climate change, as well as the importance of protecting and ensuring the resilience of the ecosystems from climate change. Urgency to act is emphasized on the basis of the best available science to share knowledge and good practices in order to leverage, accelerate and upscale the needed interventions.

In **2020**, Parties under the UNFCCC will update or renew their NDCs. Parties continue, also, to develop and implement NAPs. Solid science, science communication and co-production of knowledge is needed to support Parties implement action responding to climate change in the ocean and coastal zones.

(iii) Developing partnerships for the implementation of SDG 14 through voluntary commitments

Various partnerships are advancing climate action in ocean ecosystems in the context of the UNFCCC process, including through NAPs and NDCs, through the Marrakech Partnership on climate action, and through building on actions captured by the Secretary General's 2019 Climate Summit. These efforts will be further advanced at COP 25, including through collaborative UN system activities, high

level events and through UNDESA and UNFCCC active collaboration on climate action and SDG synergies. The work on the UNFCCC Nairobi work programme, although in early stages, has brought together an expert group to scope knowledge gaps and work together on specific issues and themes to subsequently build partnerships and co-design actions. A focal point forum at COP 25 will help advance this work which will be reported back to SBSTA 52 (2020).

Suggestions for possible themes for the interactive dialogues

- Science for ocean resilience - Operationalising the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC), including through NDCs and NAPs under the Paris Agreement and SDGs 13 and 14 – and opportunities under the UN Decade for ocean science for sustainable development;
- Enhancing synergies for climate action in ocean ecosystems – linking the outcomes of the Secretary General’s 2019 Climate Summit and COP 25 to the 2020 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14;
- Measuring collective progress of climate action focusing on ocean ecosystems under the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda.